

**VERMONT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Rooms 379-380, North Country Career Center, 209 Veterans Avenue, Newport**  
**November 17, 2009**

*The State Board and Department of Education provide support and leadership  
in the transformation of the Vermont education system in order to give each learner the opportunity to  
succeed in the 21st century.*

**Approved MINUTES**

**Present: Board Members:** Chair Fayneese Miller; Don Collins; Co-vice Chair Kathy Larsen; Brian Vachon; Robert Kelley; Stephan Morse; Ruth Stokes (9:50); Alex Melville (9:55)

**DOE:** Rae Ann Knopf, Deputy Commissioner; Jill Remick; Mark Oettinger; Gail Taylor; Noel Bryant; Ken Remsen; Susan Hayes

**Others:** John Nelson, VSBA; June Rosenberg; Rick Hilton; Richard Hoffman, NCCC Director; Bill Rivard; Robert Brinkley; Chris Buchanan; Kalee Roberts; Lucy Ramsey; Sandy Croft; Kim Gleason; Mercy Russell Hyde; Leeann Desjardins; Leo Willey (sp); Bob Midi; Bob Pequignot; David Ford; Hunter Melville; Sen. Vincent Illuzzi

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**Preliminaries**

**Item A: Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance**

Fayneese Miller, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:38 a.m.

**Item B: Roll Call and Introductions**

Board members introduced themselves, as did members of the audience.

**Item C: Announcements, Board Member Updates, October Summary (Chair, Board Members)**

There were no updates or announcements.

**Item D: Public to be Heard**

Member Don Collins introduced Sen. Vincent Illuzzi, who spoke about the North Country UHS and Career Center facilities and the use of wood chip heating and school construction funding.

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**Action Items**

**Item F: Consent Agenda**

**Motion:** Kathy Larsen moved, seconded by Brian Vachon, to approve the consent agenda with comment. Don Collins asked to share the nature of the items for those not in the audience. The motion was approved (5-0).

**1. Minutes of October 27, 2009 SBE Meeting**

**2. Independent School Approval (Pat Pallas Gray, Kerry Garber)**

Renewal of general independent school approval

Killington Mountain School, Killington, VT; grades 6-12

Renewal of general & special education independent school approval  
Compass School, Westminster, VT; grades 7-12

Renewal of special education independent school approval  
Thetford Academy, Thetford, VT; grades 7-12

Acknowledge name change  
St. Johnsbury Seventh-Day Adventist School, St. Johnsbury (now known as  
Caledonia Christian School)

### 3. SQS Waiver Authority to Commissioner (Armando Vilaseca, Mark Oettinger)

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**Item G: Essex Town School District – Supervisory Union Boundary Study** (Armando Vilaseca (via phone), Mark Oettinger)

Two members of the Essex Town School Board, Sandy Croft and Kim Gleason, attended on the behalf of that board. Kim Gleason, clerk of the Essex Town board, read a prepared statement:

**Essex Town School Board**  
58 Founders Road  
Essex Jct., VT 05452  
(802)878-8168

**Sandy Croft, Chair**  
[scroftetsd@gmail.com](mailto:scroftetsd@gmail.com)

**Brendan Kinney, Vice-Chair**  
**Beth Warren**  
[bkinneyetsd@gmail.com](mailto:bkinneyetsd@gmail.com)  
[bwarrenetsd@gmail.com](mailto:bwarrenetsd@gmail.com)

**Kim Gleason, Clerk**  
[kgleasonetsd@gmail.com](mailto:kgleasonetsd@gmail.com)

**David Clough**  
[dcloughetsd@gmail.com](mailto:dcloughetsd@gmail.com)

November 17, 2009

Dear State Board of Education Members and Commissioner Vilaseca,

The vision of the State Board of Education, *“to provide each student, regardless of learning styles, gifts, challenges circumstance or expectations, the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, careers and communities....to respond to the needs of students, provide flexible learning environments rich with 21<sup>st</sup> century tools and to expect students to demonstrate deep understanding through a variety of means,”* is a vision respected, shared and vigorously supported by the Essex Town School District. The innovation that has been cultivated in our district was made possible through our strong local leadership, passionate educators and significant development efforts throughout our district. The Edge Academy is just one example of that innovation, which Commissioner Vilaseca shared with the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan in his letter this past August. In his letter, the Commissioner said, “...Vermont’s current laws and waiver process made it possible for this community to make this dramatic change on their own rather than relying on an outside organization to do it for them.” Commissioner Vilaseca went on to say, “This is the spirit of Vermont citizens.”

In that spirit, I’m sure you can understand our concern about the prospect of being forced to abandon a structure which has led to a track record of success to join what would be the largest supervisory union in the state. The supervisory union, as a model of school governance, is well known to be inefficient with its multiple school boards, layers of administration, and bureaucracy. Despite much research on the topic, there is no evidence of cost efficiencies from consolidation in

districts greater than 900 students, even under a unified union district model. Furthermore, the evidence on student outcomes indicates as district size increases there is a corresponding decline in student achievement, graduation rates, participation in extracurricular activities, parental participation and satisfaction among students, teachers and parents (from the Rural School and Community Trust article “Anything but Research-Based: State Initiatives to Consolidate Schools and Districts”).

When considering school district consolidation, it is necessary to ensure that the benefits to students and communities outweigh the costs of consolidation. These costs would include financial outlays and the use of administrators’ time required to combine curriculum, policies, and procedures, and may be at the expense of educational leadership and student outcomes. Both the Essex Town School District and the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union already benefit from strong student performance. The two districts already work closely on aligning curriculum and sharing training costs where possible.

The recommendation to further study this matter for the next month is of particular concern given that the study completed two years ago by the Unified Union Committee involved considerable financial investment from each of the communities, thousands of volunteer hours and resulted in hundreds of pages of reports that documented no cost savings. This study was based on a much more streamlined governance model than the one currently being proposed. As you are aware, the recommendation of unification was put to the voters of the effected communities in Essex, Essex Junction and Westford, and was soundly defeated (by a two-to-one margin) in all communities. Two years later, we are in a different economic climate. Yet, in the absence of evidence of cost savings or improvements for students, and in the presence of clear successful outcomes for students in both Essex Town and Essex Junction School Districts, we struggle to understand how consolidation into a massive supervisory union is worth the risk.

If the State Board of Education votes to proceed with the study being recommended by Commissioner Vilaseca, we would have the following questions:

- (1) What will be the purpose of the study?
- (2) What will be the scope of the study?
- (3) Who will be conducting the study?
- (4) What will be required of the districts being studied?
- (5) What will be the cost of the study and who will bear that cost?

In the language of policy governance, “what benefit, for whom, and at what cost?” These are guiding tenets for our district. We would like to better understand the answers to these questions to prepare our district for the potential work involved, at this very busy time. Furthermore, we are concerned with the expense in terms of lost opportunity in the superintendent search process over the course of the next month.

The Essex Town School Board is proud of the many innovative achievements in our district over the past several years, including our transition to policy governance and the establishment of the Edge Academy. We are very appreciative of the leadership of the State Board of Education and the Commissioner in encouraging the innovation necessary to prepare our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the Education Department’s transformation efforts to ensure a system of statewide support for improving all schools. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our concerns, and look forward to your cautious deliberation of this matter.

Sincerely,

*The Essex Town School Board*

Sandy Croft, Chair

Brendan Kinney, Vice Chair

Kim Gleason, Clerk

David Clough

Beth Warren

Vilaseca spoke about the opportunity provided when a superintendent position becomes vacant. By statute, the commissioner is responsible for seeking efficiency, cost savings and curricular benefits. The proposed study would be presented at the December State Board meeting. The report will refer to the previous unification study and other data. This study would examine expanding the supervisory union boundaries, not constituting a unionized district.

**Motion:** Don Collins moved, seconded by Brian Vachon, to authorize a study of the advisability of re-grouping the supervisory union/district structure of which the Essex Town Supervisory District is a part. The motion was amended by Stephan Morse, seconded by Don Collins, to clarify that the DOE will do the study at its own expense and the study would come before the Board at its December 15th meeting. This motion was approved (7-0).

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### **Item E: Commissioner's Update**

Rae Ann Knopf, Deputy Commissioner, updated the Board on the work internally to reorganize the DOE to better serve the field. She noted five vacant positions at the department which are currently under recruitment. She also discussed the Race to the Top (RttT) application as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Board members asked about the charter school emphasis being made by the USDOE. Knopf responded that this will be addressed in the application but in terms of explaining Vermont's unique funding structure, local decision-making, and technical centers.

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### **Discussion Items**

#### **Item H: Annual Construction Aid Budget Request & Prioritized School Construction List (Cathy Hilgendorf)**

Cathy Hilgendorf (via LNV), DOE school facility and construction consultant, discussed the annual school construction aid list, which will go before the Legislature for the FY2011 Budget. She also explained there are other non-education funds (through ARRA) related to solar projects, etc., available to schools. This will be an item on at the December 15 consent agenda.

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**Item I:1. FY 2011 Budget Development Process – Update; 2. ARRA/RttT – Update; 3. Legislative Agenda Development** (Rae Ann Knopf, Bill Talbott (via LNV), Mark Oettinger) Bill Talbott said the FY11 budget is still in development. He projected the General Fund Budget numbers over the last three years (10.6 to 8.5 million dollars from last year to this). The biggest change is in grants the DOE sends out. Many of the larger funds have been shifted to the Education Fund. He noted the challenges at the state level, including the end of ARRA funds and reductions in revenues. He hopes by the December meeting there will be a budget for review. Knopf discussed the Race to the Top application and the Longitudinal Data Systems (LDS) application. There are 800 pages so Knopf and the department will spend time analyzing it carefully because there are specific points such as replacing principals that may not be a strategy in Vermont. Knopf also distributed a graphic representation of on-going work.

Miller noted a smaller group made up of Board and DOE staff members will be working on the Strategic Plan development. There will be a draft for the Board to react to in December. Brian Vachon and Stephan Morse will represent the Board. Jill Remick, Rae Ann Knopf, Carol King and four staff members from the department will participate.

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**Item J: Effective Practices in Schools Making Progress** (Panel Members from Schools, Susan Hayes, Gail Taylor)

Susan Hayes introduced the panels from the participating schools in the Effective Schools Study. The goal was to give the Board the perspective from a school which participated in the study. As part of the study, schools were asked to respond to two questions on high expectations and a systems approach.

**Panel Members:**

From Newport City Elementary School

Bob Midi (Principal)

Leo Willey (School Board Chair)

Jeane Kadmiri (Guidance Counselor)

From Bradford Elementary School:

Charles (Skip) Barrett (Principal)

Judy Slack (1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher)

Cathy Roberts (Literacy Support)

Susie Tann (School Nurse)

Panelists spoke to the importance of high expectations—truly having all staff believe that all students can learn—and a systems approach to school improvement, and spoke about their experiences, the importance of school climate and longevity of leadership, and that high expectations for all students help their school and students succeed. They responded to questions from Board members about next steps and both principals emphasized the importance of supporting principals to be leaders of school improvement. They discussed the possibility of providing mentoring/coaching for principals during their preparation as well as once they are on the job.

Susan Hayes and Gail Taylor shared a document with the Board on how to leverage these practices statewide and what this research could mean for the work of the DOE.

Chair Miller suggested that this group go on the road and share this work statewide but also nationally. Two members would be invited to accompany her to a CCTEE national conference.

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The Board recessed for lunch at 12:14 p.m., and reconvened at 1:25 p.m.

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**Item I – continued**

Mark Oettinger discussed the Legislative agenda, including several specific national and statewide issues.

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**Item L: Future Agendas, Wrap Up and Adjourn** (Board members)

List for December agenda includes:

- Strategic Plan Draft
- School Construction Vote
- Preliminary FY11 Budget Proposal

- Essex Town SD Boundary Study
- Transformation Policy Commission Report
- Usual Updates

**Motion:** At 1:43 p.m., Stephan Morse moved, seconded by Alex Melville, to adjourn the November 17, 2009 meeting of the State Board of Education. The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

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**Item M: Visit to Newport City Elementary School**

Board members and Department staff accompanied Principal Bob Midi to the Newport City Elementary School for a brief visit.

Minutes recorded by Jill Remick  
Minutes prepared by Carol King

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**Item J Handout:**

*The State Board and Department of Education provide support and leadership in the transformation of the Vermont education system in order to give each learner the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century.*

Overall Goal: Develop a coherent, research-based statewide system of support

1. The Department produces and provides research on effective practices to schools and districts so they clearly understand what it takes to help all students succeed.
2. The Department and external partners adequately support schools and districts to pursue improvement strategies that will bring about success for students. Support is tailored to systems' specific needs and challenges and differentiated based on their level of performance and readiness to act.
3. The Department creates a tiered system of support that allows schools not identified under the AYP system to receive assistance but prioritizes those schools in greatest need of improvement.

4. The Department works collaboratively with a variety of external partners—including professional organizations, professional development agencies, private consultants, and higher education—to ensure that the support provided to the field is high quality, consistent with the research on school effectiveness, and well coordinated (i.e. not fragmented or duplicative).
5. The Department continually evaluates, refines, and improves its system of support to ensure effectiveness.